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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (01/25): Local press report that no progress was made during Special Envoy Mitchell's visit

Main Stories:

-----The dailies lead with news on Special Envoy George Mitchell's meeting with Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas in Amman yesterday. The headlines announce that nothing new came out of the meeting. Independent daily Al-Quds' headline reads that the PA refuses to resume negotiations without clear terms of reference and without a full cessation of settlement activity. PA official daily Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reports that Mitchell reaffirmed the US commitment to a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, including the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. The PA President's Spokesman Nabil Abu Rudeineh noted that it is too early to talk about a breakthrough in the resumption of negotiations.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida reports that King Abdullah of Jordan met with Special Envoy Mitchell yesterday and reiterated the importance of continuing US efforts to resume peace talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

The dailies report that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that the big settlements in the West Bank are an integral part of Israel and will remain there forever.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadida front pages news that the Arab Information Ministers said that the draft Congressional legislation to impose sanctions on Arab satellite channels that promote incitement an intrusion on the internal affairs of the Arab states. Additionally, they called on the US to differentiate between incitement and the right of the Palestinian people to defend their rights.

The dailies report on Hamas member Aziz Dweik announcing that the PLC will continue working as usual despite the January 24 deadline

by which elections were supposed to be held. Dweik called for a meeting of all PLC members and asked the President's office to "facilitate the meeting in an effort toward national reconciliation and creating a unified front against Israel."

The dailies report that Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak criticized Hamas yesterday regarding its position on the steel wall. Mubarak accused Hamas of creating chaos on the Egyptian border and stressed that Egypt has sovereignty over its land.

Al-Quds front pages a report that there is a serious crisis in Israeli-Jordanian relations because of Israeli construction works in Jerusalem. Al-Quds also runs news citing an Israeli source saying that one of Netanyahu's aids visited Jordan twice this month and conveyed messages that Israel wants Jordan to play a key role in ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Weekend Stories:

Sunday, January 24:

Al-Quds and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida run front page stories on President Abbas' meeting today in Amman with the Special Envoy Mitchell. Reports cite Israeli government officials saying that President Obama will continue his efforts to achieve progress in the peace process, but at a different pace after admitting his mistaken assessment of the level of Israeli and Palestinian's readiness to return to negotiations. Chief PA negotiator Saeb Erekat said that

JERUSALEM 00000141 002 OF 003

Israel is imposing pre-conditions on the resumption of negotiations and is imposing the reality of a one state solution or the bi-national state. The reports also note that Israeli sources claim that Egypt is playing a negative role to prevent the resumption of peace negotiations.

Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida run front page stories on Nabil Abu Rudeineh, the Spokesperson for the Office of the President, calling on Hamas to sign the Egyptian national reconciliation plan to allow the conducting of general presidential and legislative elections. Abu Rudeineh added "There is an important and maybe a last chance if Hamas signs the Egyptian document to allow the conducting of elections in June, thus allowing all matters to be addressed through these elections."

The local press report on US National Security Council Spokesperson Mike Hammer stating that the US is ready to provide security assurances and guarantees to the Palestinians and Israelis if an agreement is reached, stressing Washington's commitment to the peace process. Hammer added, in an interview with the London-based Al Sharq Al Awsat newspaper, "We hope to play the role of the fair broker. We talk to the Israelis and the PA and they should know that it's in their interest to get back to the negotiations and that their security needs will be realized through the reaching of an agreement. In this context, the US is ready to provide some guarantees to reassure the parties that the agreement will hold and that they can be confident that they will be in a better situation as a result of the agreement."

Al-Quds front pages a story on Israeli MK Yisrael Hasson from Kadima, an ex-senior official in the Israeli Shabak who took part in the negotiations with the Palestinian side in the past, saying that the question of Jerusalem should be resolved on the basis of partnership without dividing up the city. Hasson also said that the Palestinian leadership should have the courage to tell its people that the historic agreement with Israel, once reached, will not realize the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

Saturday, January 23:

The three dailies lead with stories on Friday's meeting between President Abbas and Special Envoy George Mitchell. Reports note that the meeting ended with disagreements between the Palestinian and American views, thus deepening an atmosphere of pessimism regarding

the possibility of resuming negotiations. The Spokesperson for the Office of the President Nabil Abu Rudeineh said that Mitchell's latest round in the region, despite its importance, has not achieved a breakthrough as no agreement was reached to resume negotiations.

The three dailies also front page stories on a large demonstration that took place in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of East Jerusalem on Friday by Palestinians, foreign solidarity activists, and members of Israeli left wing movements protesting settlement activities and house evictions. Israeli forces sealed off the entrances to the neighbourhood and deployed hundreds of Israeli soldiers, police forces, and special units preventing the protestors from reaching the settlement outposts and the houses that were seized in the neighbourhood. The Israeli forces arrested 13 protestors. A similar demonstration took place in the Al Bustan neighbourhood in Silwan to protest Israeli plans to demolish 88 houses there.

Al-Quds runs a front page story citing the Israeli army radio station reporting that settlement activities continue in Kiryat

JERUSALEM 00000141 003 OF 003

Nataveem near Nablus despite the decision to temporarily freeze settlement activities in the West Bank for ten months.

BLOCK QUOTE:

Talal Okal, writing in Al-Ayyam under the title "The US Reverse Will Jeopardize the Whole Region" opines that in light of the deteriorating US role in the Middle East peace process and the lack of any other key player like the EU or UN, Israel will become stronger and will implement harsher policies on the ground.
RUBINSTEIN